

Pay-Per-View: A Report Card

Matwatch
'94

Steve
Beverly

On our post-game Reporters' Roundtable review of *Slamboree*, Lance Russell asked perhaps the most pertinent question of the night: do the "legends" have a place in wrestling?

Lance had just a month earlier experienced arguably the most effective use of television to build a nostalgic show, the well-received *Monday Night Memories* at the Mid-South Coliseum, honoring the celebrated stars of the Memphis promotion, dating back to the 1950s.

Memphis legends, such as Sputnik Monroe, were even given extensive mainstream media coverage in *The Commercial Appeal* newspaper and for five weeks prior to the show, liberal clips of classic moments from the Memphis TV show were interspersed through throughout the weekly telecasts. Jimmy Hart even wrote an original song, "Monday Night Memories," which was edited to a video.

With the kind of buildup *Monday Night Memories* received, a weak turnout would have confirmed a "no" answer to Lance's question. But more than 8,000—the largest crowd since the Jerry Lawler AWA world title victory over Curt Hennig in 1988—crammed into the Mid-South Coliseum. Events coordinator Randy Hales deserves the lion's share of the credit.

So why do the old-timers (and a few who aren't so old) receive such lukewarm or poor receptions when introduced at *Slamboree*? Dave Meltzer put his finger on one key: most of the legends in Philadelphia never actively campaigned there. But Scott Hudson hit the heart of the matter even deeper.

"*Monday Night Memories*" succeeded because it was based on an old territory which, the only one which survived Vince McMahon's purge," said Hudson. "And Memphis has continued to keep the name of its legends alive through all the changes in wrestling the last ten years. The names still meant something to a lot of people."

Meltzer added, "Ten years ago, when the WWF went national, Titan acted as if all past history in wrestling didn't exist. So, today's generation doesn't even know who many wrestlers from the era before 1984."

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In the seven years of true pay-per-view mat competition, the battle for dollars has been that of innovation, production and performance. The recent *Slamboree* show provokes *Matwatch '94* into a serious review of the format.

Most analysts agree *Wrestlemania* was the shot-in-the-arm the World Wrestling Federation needed to re-establish itself as the accomplished leader in pay-per-view production. The introduction of a spectacular new gimmick bout in the Shawn Michaels-Razor Ramon ladder match and breathtaking panorama shots of Madison Square Garden, as well as a live pickup of the spillover crowd in Felt Forum, provided zip and sizzle to the show. Whereas Jerry Lawler is a bit too scripted when working with Vince McMahon on mike, Lawler's personality added an infusion of entertainment to the commentary missing from recent WWF shows. Plus, Titan has not forgotten how to engineer a top-flight post-match celebration for a title change, which included Burt Reynolds returning for a congratulatory hug of Bret Hart.

Slamboree had its moments—but raised enough questions to make one consider if the assembly-line structure of pay-per-views in World Championship Wrestling, in particular, hasn't taken a toll on the attention to detail which made the early years of Ted Turner's ownership of WCW special.

First, the positives of *Slamboree*:

***Having the legends march out at the top of the show with accompanying baseball card-style graphics (similar to those Jim Ross created for *Starrcade '90*) was far superior to that clumsy parade at the 1993 *Slamboree*, even with the snafu over the Terry Funk-Verne Gagne introductions.

***Launching the show with a title bout of substance featuring a character of the apparent charisma of Mark Merro as Johnny B. Badd and a heel who has appeal for the Philadelphia crowd in Steve Austin was a plus, even if some viewers believe it was one of the lesser-quality matches on the show. Subscribers were at least given a match of consequence off the top.

***Alternating Jesse Ventura and Bobby Heenan at the color mike may have been the only way to settle which gets the most prominent exposure on pay-per-views. Ventura works better in the brawls, though he and Tony Schiavone laughed through portions of the street fight, Heenan in less action-filled bouts. Heenan's most serious flaw is trying to be too WWF-style comical during the feature bout. He was during Flair-Steamboat at *Spring Stampede* and too inappropriately humorous in key moments of the Sting-Vader contest.

***Having Gordon Solie call the "legends" match was a lesson learned from last year when Solie was bypassed. Gordon is the announcing legend and placing him at the mike for Funk-Blanchard was not only the appropriate but the decent thing to do. Plus, Heenan dovetails well with Solie.

***The show did bring us an emotional moment when Solie recounted the words of Dick (The Bruiser) Afflis' grandson to his grandmother as the family gathered for Dick's funeral. Gordon was visibly moved and we saw a rare

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SPECIAL NOTICE

This issue of *Matwatch '94* covers the period of May and very early June. A second June issue will be published next week. The July issue will be mailed after July 18.

Steve Beverly

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All three of those viewpoints have validity. Dave's final point is backed up by a story Joe Pedicino once told me. "The WWF did a lot of research when they first went national," said Pedicino. "Jack and Jerry Brisco were phased out in less than a year as a tag team because too few in the younger audience knew who they were. Here was Jack, a legendary NWA world champion, and all of that history meant nothing to the mid-'80s wrestling fan."

Joe did an informal survey of some fans shortly after he joined WCW for his one-year stint in 1989. He said of the few who remembered the Briscos, the reaction was along the lines of, "Oh, aren't they those guys who were around a little while right when the WWF got started?"

As one who grew up in the era when many of those legends introduced in Philadelphia were in their prime, I sincerely do believe they have a place and an earned right to be remembered in the same fashion as mainstream sports legends. What the veterans did before today's performers paved the way for the contemporary style of production. But wrestling, particularly through television, has to do a far superior job of educating its younger viewers to the past.

A key reason the Memphis nostalgia show was a big hit rested in a five-week buildup of 10-minute slickly-produced segments highlighted memorable studio angles and arena bouts of the stars dating back to the 1960s. Even a history of the Memphis television mat show itself was presented.

WCW would have been well-served to have announced the Hall of Fame selections in advance (all jokes about Assassin Jody Hamilton's induction aside) and spent four weeks on television showing extensive vignettes, including clips of legendary bouts featuring the inductees. Heaven forbid, with six shows, the company wastes plenty of time with far more meaningless material. At least a performance could have accompanied the name.

Further, the choice of Philadelphia—arguably the toughest town in wrestling—to host this show was an ill-advised one. At least half of the legends on the show-opening march were primarily AWA stars. Unless it was in a 1985 WWF preliminary, Mr. Wrestling II, who brought down the house last year in Atlanta, never worked there. Don Curtis hadn't wrestled there in at least 30 years. WCW ought to keep this show in Atlanta, and emphasize legends from the old TBS era, along with perhaps a sprinkling of non-NWA veterans.

However, except in a unique territory such as Memphis, Meltzer may have the right idea. On the Roundtable, Dave said, "Maybe four or five years from now, the WWF could do a legends show which would have a chance to draw legitimate fan reaction. Bringing back a Roddy Piper, a Paul Orndorff, maybe then, even a Hulk Hogan, when all of them are past 45, would interest people who first became wrestling fans in the mid-'80s."

Nevertheless, I hope WCW will not give up on the tradition of *Slamboree*—because seeing the stars of my youth, even though seeing them age is a bit painful, is worth the purchase price.

PPV: A Report Card

(Continued from Page 1)

glimpse of human emotion wrestling has not allowed us to see since Joe Pedicino's *Pro Wrestling This Week* tribute to Bruiser Brody in 1988.

But on the *other* side of the coin:

***The graphics, aside from the baseball cards, camera angles and overall production were hardly innovative. The shows have become too formula in their look on WCW pay-cable.

***Next, someone needs to tell Eric Bischoff firmly Michael Buffer is hopelessly miscast on a wrestling show. The guy is a boxing announcer and to suggest he adds to these shows by hollering, "Let's get ready to rummmmmble," is sheer fantasy and a slap at arguably the best in-ring announcer in the game, Gary Capetta.

COMMENTARY

***Third, the production crew was caught short again during the street brawl when the wrestlers went to the floor. They moved out of the lights. Seven years ago, we were screaming for battery lights on all hand-held floor cameras for such situations. They're inexpensive and maintain a quality look during an erratic bout.

***For such a fuss to be made over the "international world" title status at the top of the show, Monty Hall used to generate 20 times as much enthusiasm over the "big deal of the day" as WCW did for Sting's victory. Not only was there no post-match interview (far more important than watching Vader growl one more time), the pyrotechnics didn't go off until long after Sting was had departed. Jim Herd fired pyrotechnicians for less than that. The crowning moment would have brought the babyface legends back out for a congratulatory handshake for Sting to cap the theme. Again, poor planning.

In addition, may we offer two other suggestions for the next *Slamboree* which will be ignored:

***Instead of so many droning interviews with the legends, who were all asked predominantly the same "how do you feel?" questions by Gene Okerlund and provided identical answers, why not intersperse clips of the Slam Meet and Slam Feast events of the weekend and show the veterans interacting with the fans, which is a major symbol of the weekend? The show would move faster and the visuals would be livelier.

***The Hall of Fame inductions should be central to this show (if you can take them seriously after Jody Hamilton's inclusion). But placing them in the middle of the show severely slows the pace of the broadcast. Instead, why not bring the entire national audience into it? Do *WCW Main Event* live on TBS at its usual 6:05 Eastern time and spend the first 25 minutes building the card and encouraging last-minute buys. Place most of your commercial breaks during that period. Then, do the Hall of Fame inductions live on *Main Event* from 6:30 to 7. Let Gordon preside over them. But include more and longer action clips of the five or six inductees to give more meaning to the home audience for their careers. And allow the vets a couple of minutes each to make acceptance remarks, rather than making them into mute relics. Then, as *WCW Main Event* ends, announce the beginning of the march of the legends, start it as the opening of the pay-per-view and have the legends bout first, in order to maintain continuity and not compete with the standard fare.

Jim Herd was oft-criticized when he was the head of WCW but he produced pay-per-view shows which offered innovation and distinction, rather than formula. Adult viewers preferred the showcasing over the WWF. Unfortunately, WCW pay-per-view shows have become as predictable as Titan specials were prior to *Wrestlemania*. For all of the dynamism Eric Bischoff was supposed to bring to these shows, the most distinctive element has become the lengthy freeze-frame of his executive producer credit at the end.



HEADLINES

Candy Passes At Age 41

ATLANTA—Veteran wrestler Ray Candy died May 23 in Atlanta of a sudden heart attack. He was 41.

Candy, born Raymond Canty, broke into wrestling in 1972 as Gorilla Watts in the original Paul Jones-Ray Gunkel NWA Georgia circuit.

When Gunkel's widow Ann broke off into an independent Georgia group after Gunkel's death, Candy was pushed as a breakthrough black star, rising to the lead babyface role as the group's U.S. champion in 1974.

Candy later went on to appear in the heel roles of Kareem Muhammad, Blackstud Williams (for Billy Jack Haynes' short-lived 1988 Oregon group) and Commando Ray in the closing months of Jim Crockett Promotions and for Dusty Rhodes' aborted Florida Championship group in 1989.

"Thunder" Renewed But Ratings Dip

NEW YORK—Ryser/TPE has renewed Hulk Hogan's *Thunder in Paradise* series for 32 new episodes during the 1994-95 season but ratings for the action-adventure hour have dipped sharply.

Thunder drew a strong 6.7 rating and 10 per cent share of audience for its two-hour national premiere in syndication but after the debut, the show never cracked the top 15 in the Nielsen ratings of syndicated programs.

The series, airing in 112 markets, averaged a 4.9 rating and 7 share for its first ten airings. That compares to a 6.6 for *Baywatch*, the top-rated non-science fiction action hour.

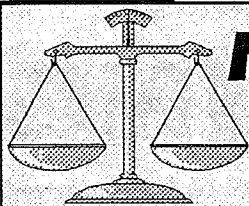
Slamboree Buy-Rate Estimated at 0.48

ATLANTA—Cablevision Industries estimates the buy-rate for *Slamboree* at 1.68 per cent, lowest in the history of the event.

Southeastern manager Kim Kersey says an analysis of major cable markets placed the WCW production in an estimated 112,000 homes. Final figures will be available in mid-July.

If the early estimates hold, the show would gross an estimated \$2.85 million, of which approximately \$1.15 million would go to WCW after splits.

The Wrestling Observer's Dave Meltzer reported last week on *The Real Wrestling Hotline* WCW would have to average a .87 buy-rate to break even on three scheduled PPV shows with Hulk Hogan.



MATWATCH '94 EDITORIALS

IT WAS GREAT, BUT.....

Okay, we will quite agree the Cactus Jack/Kevin Sullivan vs. Nasty Boys street brawl was a tour de force at *Slamboree*. It was both brutal and captivating to watch. But one has to ask if the safety factor hasn't gone totally out the window for these high-risk, rip-up-everything-in-the-building bouts.

Cactus is one of the favorite performers of this publication because of his perpetual effort to give of the best of his abilities, regardless of the crowd size or his physical condition. Nonetheless, this is a man who had just weeks earlier lost an ear. To allow his participation in this bout was, at best, questionable, no matter the performance he delivered—which was a sensational one.

Jerry Saggs of the Nasty Boys also went into the bout reportedly injured. Saggs took a blow from Maxx Payne's guitar which would have stunned even a man wearing a football helmet. Again, a crowd-pleaser which also ranks in the depths of common sense.

Matwatch '94 clearly believes a place exists for a limited number of these types of bouts. However, the word limited should be underscored. And stronger measures should be taken to ensure protection for wrestlers going into such events injured, even if they resist. Not only for the sake of liability but for the well-being of the wrestler.

HERE WE GO AGAIN

Jim Cornette will insist fuddy-duddy time is here again. He will likely draw increased crowds from one of his most heated televised angles. However, the situation again raises an oft-considered social question from this corner.

The action of Jake Roberts piledriving Dirty White Girl Kim Anthony during the taped Roberts-Tony Anthony bout of *Volunteer Slam* on *Smoky Mountain Wrestling* tears a page from summertime in Memphis.

Virtually every year, Jerry Lawler begins reinserting men-hitting-women angles to heat up the summertime crowd. Cornette's decision to incorporate this into the SMW storylines may be good for business but likewise appeals to the darker side of his audience.

The most recent crime statistics indicate the most prevalent locales for domestic violence involving men abusing women are Southern rural cities with heavy blue-collar populations. The argument can be weighed on whether Cornette, one of the most creative minds ever in the mat game, is merely reflecting or reinforcing vulnerabilities of his prime audience. *Matwatch '94* suggests the consequences are too potentially severe. The Roberts-Anthony angle should be the last of its kind in the Smoky Mountain promotion.

WE GOTTA GO!!!

Three dreaded words which used to spill from the mouth of former NWA/WCW announcer David Crockett when booker Dusty Rhodes would produce a show in which the final bout would not be completed at show's end. Perpetually, the ending would either never be shown or clumsily explained to the viewers the following week. Ratings rarely increased for succeeding shows as the audience was more incensed at seeing an incomplete show.

Wrestling producers appeared to have learned their lesson—until the weekends of May 28 and June 4. The WCW *Saturday Night* failure to air the full Steve Regal-Larry Zbyszko TV title match was far more of an irritation than a cliffhanger. To attempt to fool viewers into believing the bout stays in suspense for seven days is yet another attempt to treat television viewers as idiots. Tony Schiavone almost sounded like Crockett when he closed the episode.

The Global promotion pulled the same sleight-of-hand the following weekend. The closing moments of a Bunkhouse Stampede battle royal ended with Black Bart and Scott Putski the final two competitors. Putski was on the ring apron when Skandor Akbar appeared apparently to "make an offer" to Putski. Host Doyle King abruptly announced time was not left to bring the sequence to a close and viewers would have to wait until June 11 to discover the ending. As weak as Global's TV lineup is, producer Grey Pierson should know better.

Matwatch '94 calls for an end to this asinine practice. Quality soap opera in wrestling means good continuing storylines, not leaving the audience angry and unsatisfied with matches not shown in their entirety in a single episode.

THE RATINGS PAGE

CABLE WRESTLING RATINGS

Apr. Averages	Rating/Share	Total Homes	Mar. Avg.
Monday Night Raw	3.4/4.2	2.09 million	2.9/4.3
WCW Sat. Night	2.2/5.0	1.34 million	2.5/5.2
WWF All-American	2.0/5.4	1.25 million	2.2/5.5
WCW Main Event	2.0/3.8	1.25 million	2.3/4.0
WCW Pro	1.5/5.8	936,000	1.7/6.5
WWF Mania	1.3/4.5	781,000	1.3/3.8

Week Ending Apr. 4	Rating/Share	Total Homes	N. Rank
Monday Night Raw	3.3/4.2	2.02 million	6
WCW Main Event	2.5/5.0	1.55 million	26
WWF All-American	2.5/6.2	1.54 million	28
WCW Sat. Night	2.1/4.8	1.28 million	39
WCW Pro Wrestling	1.7/6.9	1.03 million	
WWF Mania	1.2/4.1	738,000	

Week Ending Apr. 11

Monday Night Raw	3.3/4.9	2.03 million	7
WCW Sat. Night	2.2/4.9	1.34 million	35
WWF All-American	1.9/5.6	1.17 million	
WCW Pro Wrestling	1.6/6.3	959,000	
WWF Mania	1.5/4.9	923,000	

Week Ending Apr. 18

Monday Night Raw	3.7/5.6	2.32 million	4
WCW Sat. Night	2.2/5.0	1.35 million	37
WWF All-American	2.1/5.3	1.31 million	
WCW Main Event	1.7/3.7	1.03 million	
WCW Pro Wrestling	1.5/5.6	938,000	
WWF Mania	1.3/3.9	800,000	

Week Ending Apr. 25

Monday Night Raw	3.2/4.6	1.98 million	8
WCW Sat. Night	2.2/5.2	1.36 million	35
WCW Main Event	1.9/4.0	1.16 million	
WWF All-American	1.5/4.5	925,000	
WCW Pro Wrestling	1.3/5.1	790,000	
WWF Mania	1.1/3.7	677,000	

Sat., April 30

WCW Sat. Night	2.2/5.3	1.37 million	34
WCW Pro Wrestling	1.6/6.5	961,000	
WWF Mania	1.4/5.0	861,000	

May Averages	Rating/Share	Total Homes	Year Ago
Monday Night Raw	3.0/4.5	1.85 million	2.7/4.0
WCW Sat. Night	2.2/5.5	1.30 million	2.0/4.9
WCW Main Event	1.7/3.7	1.06 million	1.9/4.3
WWF All-American	1.7/5.5	1.03 million	2.1/6.9
WCW Pro	1.4/5.6*	829,000	1.3/5.3**
WWF Mania	1.0/3.7	612,000	1.1/3.8

May 1-2

Monday Night Raw	2.9/4.2	1.78 million	10
WWF All-American	1.9/5.6	1.16 million	
WCW Main Event	1.8/3.7	1.10 million	

Week Ending May 9

Monday Night Raw	2.5/3.5	1.54 million	20
WCW Sat. Night	2.0/4.8	1.16 million	34
WCW Main Event	1.7/3.9	1.04 million	
WWF All-American	1.5/4.7	926,000	
WCW Pro	1.2/4.8	728,000	
WWF Mania	1.2/4.3	727,000	

(Continued on Page 5)

THE APRIL-MAY STORY

A double record highlighted *Monday Night Raw* during April with a single-night all-time high of 3.7 (and record 5.6 per cent share) on the 18th and a new one-month average mark with a 3.4. The figure was the highest single-month average for a wrestling show in more than four years. *WCW Saturday Night* and *Main Event* fell solidly, however, from their promising increases of March. The TBS Saturday show dropped back to a 2.2, 14 percent off its March average. *Main Event* was down 13 per cent from March and the decline was even more stark in May. *WWF All-American* was down 9 per cent in April.

The morning show competition on Saturday went to *WCW Pro* by two-tenths of a point but the series was down 12 per cent from its strong premiere in March. Other than *Raw*, *WWF Mania* was the only series to remain at least flat from March, helped by a fairly strong 1.5 April 9.

YEAR-TO-YEAR TOTALS

Effective with this issue, we begin providing year-to-year rating comparisons, starting with the week ending May 16 (on page 5). In the television industry, trends can be estimated by looking at month-to-month ratings; however, audience growth or decline can only legitimately be judged over the same dates from the previous year because audience levels vary, according to seasons.

Typically, the heaviest viewing months are January and February because of cold and icy weather, which keeps a larger percentage of Eastern and upper Midwest viewers indoors. Ironically, for cable, August tends to be an increased audience month because cable networks designate August for strong viewer promotions and first-run specials. The period of May-July usually draws the smallest audiences, if established trends follow. March-April and early fall months are considered periods of average audience levels. Late August and early September hurt ratings for *Monday Night Raw* because of frequent pre-emptions for tennis.

FINAL NOTES

Jim Crockett insisted, on a recent visit to Atlanta, his yet-to-air *World Wrestling Network* will have its next taping—if there is one—in the Carolinas, not Las Vegas as reported elsewhere. Crockett, as predicted, is having a tough time pitching the show in syndication....The recent switch of 12 large-to-medium market CBS/ABC/NBC affiliates to Fox will lead to a domino effect of other switches and that could create a new scramble of shopping the big two syndicated wrestling shows this fall....Joe Pedicino and Boni Blackstone's Saturday mat marathon on WTLK in Atlanta has been moved to 11 a.m.-3 p.m....USA Network may consider a "Best of Raw" marathon, ala the TBS/WCW All-Nighter in the spring....You folks who pick up Galavision for Lucha Libre events by satellite dishes are about to lose it. The Spanish-language network is about to switch to a digital feed and digital descramblers are not yet available for the moment market. Not sure how this will affect cable viewers....Expect a bundle of pre-trial stories from local New York stations and at least three tabloid newsmagazine shows in advance of next month's proceedings against Vince McMahon....WCW's intention to go live with *WCW Saturday Night* as a one-time-only trial next month should be a clear indication of whether Jim Herd's 1990 proposal will boost ratings. Herd wanted to go live four years ago on Saturday nights but was told it was too expensive and would be a detriment to Saturday arena show revenues.

MATWATCH '94 SUBSCRIPTIONS

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Cable Ratings

(Continued from Page 4)

Wk. End. May 16	Rating/Share	Total Homes	Yr. Ago
Monday Night Raw	3.5/5.2	2.15 million	2.9/4.1
WCW Sat. Night	2.4/5.8	1.46 million	2.0/5.3
WCW Main Event	1.7/3.5	1.04 million	2.2/4.7
WWF All-American	1.7/5.2	1.03 million	2.6/7.7
WCW Pro	1.7/7.2	1.03 million	1.2/4.9
WWF Mania	0.9/3.3	554,000	1.0/3.8

Week Ending May 23

Monday Night Raw	3.0/4.4	1.85 million	2.7/4.0
WCW Sat. Night	1.9/4.9	1.17 million	2.0/4.1
WCW Main Event	1.7/3.8	1.04 million	N/A
WWF All-American	1.7/6.1	1.04 million	2.6/8.0
WCW Pro	1.2/4.9	730,000	1.2/5.1
WWF Mania	0.9/3.4	555,000	1.3/4.7

Week Ending May 30

Monday Night Raw	3.1/4.8	1.91 million	2.6/4.1
WCW Sat. Night	2.3/6.4	1.41 million	1.9/5.2
WWF All-American	1.7/5.9	1.05 million	1.9/5.7
WCW Pro***	0.8/4.2	490,000	1.1/4.7

* Does not include *WCW Pro* which aired at 8:05 a.m. (EDT) May 28. With that week figured, the average rating and share is 1.2/5.3.

** May 1993 average for *WCW Power Hour*.

*** Program aired one hour earlier than normal.

THE REAL WRESTLING HOTLINE

OPTION 1

Dave Meltzer (M-W-F)

Steve Beverly (Tu-Sa)

Scott Hudson (Th)

Mark Madden (Sun)

OPTION 2

Mark Mooneyham (M) *Critic-
at Large (F)*

Scott Hudson (Tu) *Cody Boyns (Sa)*

Ron Lemieux (W) *Georgiann Makropoulos (Su)*

Steven DeTruth (Th)

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Ross Returns Home To Atlanta

ATLANTA---One year after a journey northward to a Connecticut winter and a stint with the World Wrestling Federation, Jim Ross has returned to the familiar expressways of Atlanta to plot his next career move.

The 42-year-old mike veteran, winner of six consecutive *Wrestling Observer* Announcer of the Year viewer polls, is exploring several career options in the wake of leaving Titan Sports.

"I've talked to a lot of people and had some good talks," said Ross, in a recent telephone conversation. "It's still going to be about another 30 or 45 days before I'll be healthy enough to work a full schedule." Ross is in the final stages of recovery from Bell's Palsy, a disease which affects the facial muscles, prevents tearing of the eye and creates slurred speech.

Ross says the illness and subsequent therapy have changed his outlook on a number of things. "You realize when you have something like this that the things you often think are important aren't nearly as important as your health," said Ross. "You have to learn a lot of patience and that's not something I've always been noted for...but I've gained a lot of it. You recognize you're not going to get well tomorrow after having this."

Ross is not publicly commenting on reports he may seek or be sought for a return to World Championship Wrestling or by other mat groups, or on his departure from the WWF. "We're exploring a lot of opportunities and Atlanta is a great place to do that," said Ross. "WSB Radio is getting the Braves and Hawks back in the next two years, which will bring a lot more of a sports emphasis to the station. And there's a lot of talk radio possibilities here I wouldn't mind trying. But we're just taking our time."

On the immediate front, Ross is plowing into a new marketing venture. More on that situation in next week's *Matwatch '94*.

Lance's Return Creates Popular Response

MEMPHIS---With the hearty and classic "whoa-kay," Lance Russell's return to *USWA Championship Wrestling* has created a popular reaction throughout the Memphis circuit.

Russell agreed to return for approximately 20-25 appearances a year on the live Memphis Saturday morning show where he presided for nearly 30 years before leaving for a four-year stint with World Championship Wrestling in 1989.

"We've agreed to do at least two or three weeks out of the four during the key rating sweep periods and scatter several more out during the year," said Russell. "After the *Monday Memories* went so well, there were a lot of requests for me to do it. But I said, 'No way are we going to do this full-time.' (The USWA people) understand that."

Lance has been enjoying retirement with his wife Audrey. The Russells frequently travel to visit their children and take their grandchildren on regular outings to Disney World and assorted other amusements. "Aud and I don't want to get ourselves tied down to the responsibility of every Saturday morning any more because we have too many things we enjoy doing," said Russell. "But they've agreed for us to work at whatever pace we want to. It's clearly understood that if at any time I feel it's too much or if they feel I'm not doing the job, we can end it with no hard feelings."

That scenario is unlikely. The WMC-TV studio audience has responded with loud ovations for Lance in his first two return weeks. Already, he has reverted to his classic confrontations with heels at the announce desk in angles with Eddie Gilbert and the Troy (Dream Machine) Graham ("Why don't you just get outta here, Troy. You come out here. You spray ink in the man's eye. You're just real proud of yourself, aren't you?").

Russell will appear at the Mid-South Coliseum most Mondays after his Saturday TV appearances. "It's a matter of principle," said Lance. "I always believed it's unfair to the audience to ask them to pay their money to come on Monday night if I'm not going to be there, too."



THEY SAID IT!!!

The Best of April-May

1. Terry Funk, ECW: "I may be an old fart. But you can't take the heart out of an old fart." 2. Bobby Heenan, WCW *Saturday Night*: "Cactus Jack and Kevin Sullivan teaming up would be like going to Roseanne and Tom Arnold for marriage advice." 3. Lance Russell, USWA, on Eddie Gilbert/Dream Machine: "If they were wrestling The Devil and Jason, I'd root for The Devil and Jason." 4. Paul Orndorff/Jesse Ventura/Eric Bischoff, WCW *Main Event*: (PO) "Shut up, pig-eyes!" (JV) "Who's Orndorff talking about, Bischoff? Your girl friend?" (EB) "Shut up, Jesse. I don't have a girl friend." 5. Rick Rude, WCW: "Vader, you're a great roll model. Lift your shirt up. Model some rolls." 6. Heenan, WCW, on Dusty Rhodes: "He's a poor man's Tex Ritter." 7. Stan Lane/Ted DiBiase, WWF *Challenge*: (SL) "Lex Luger makes you want to go in the gym and pump iron." (TD) "When are you going to start?" (SL) "I've got the dumbbell right here. Sorry about that, Ted." 8. Vince McMahon/Jim Cornette/Jerry Lawler, Monday Night Raw: (V) "Think Cornette's color-blind?" (JC) "I'm bilingual." (JL) "I heard that, too." 9. Todd Pettengill, WWF *Mania*, "My aunt just went to Syracuse after her wedding. I don't know what you do in Syracuse on your honeymoon. But when you've been married eight times...." 10. Larry Zbyszko, WCW: "Erik Watts has more combinations than a safe." 11. Rhodes, WCW: "I may have the body of an old man but I've got a 25-year-old mind and thunder in my guts." 12. Gordon Solie/Rhodes/Zbyszko, WCW *Pro*, on Erik Watts vs. The Gambler: (GS) "You gotta know when to hold 'em and know when to fold 'em." (DR) "Goddon came up with that Kenny Rogers song all by himself." (LZ) "Are we talking wild cards, D.R.?" 13. Gilbert, USWA, to Jimmy Valiant: "You took Tommy Lasorda's place as the new poster boy for Slim Fast." 14. Heenan, *Slamboree*: "Talk about tough fans. In this town, they boo the Easter bunny." 15. Heenan, *Slamboree*: "The waitress said, 'We want blood,' when she brought my omelet. Must have been out of salsa." 16. Heenan, *Slamboree*: "What do you put at the end of a sentence? Usually a period. Here, you get parole."

Strongest Comments

1. Funk, ECW: "We don't have to have our nose up Todd Gordon's butt. We don't have to have our nose up Eric Bischoff's butt." 2. Gene Okerlund, WCW: "From the famous Anderson family--and this one goes waaaaay back --Ole Anderson." 3. Lawler, USWA: "You people know there's nobody I hate any more than Vince McMahon." 4. Michael Hayes, GWF: "We've been a lot of places....including one which couldn't figure out what to do with us." 5. Funk, *Slamboree*: "I am THE legend in the most hostile city in the United States. I am a hardcore wrestler." 6. Verne Gagne, *Slamboree*, on street brawl: "This had nothing to do with wrestling."

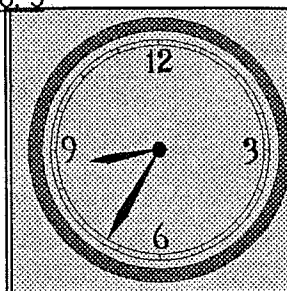
And the Rest....

BAD TASTE/BOO AWARD: Gilbert, USWA: "Head-hinkers, you'll find out just like what Jackie Onassis found out. I put her out of her misery....and I'll put the Headshrinkers out of theirs."

BEST INTERVIEW: Jim Cornette, SMW, on departure of Heavenly Bodies.

ALL-CLICHE TEAM: 1. Tony Schiavone, WCW, "Give me a break," (4 times on 5/21). 2. Stan Lane, WWF *Mania*, for telling DiBiase, "You got that right" 4 times on 5/21.

BLOOPER AWARD: WCW, for Verne Gagne appearing as Terry Funk introduced on *Slamboree* walk of legends.



As
Time
Goes
By

Lance Russell guests with Dave Weatherly on *Sportstalk* from 6-7 p.m. Friday night (June 10) on WNWS-FM 101.5 in Jackson, Tn. The station transmits nearly to Memphis and as far as the Kentucky border in northwest Tennessee. Call-ins are welcome....The Nasty Boys and Jimmy Hart appeared on a nearly two-year-old *Best of Arsenio Hall* June 1....The *Vicki!* episode featuring Sting, Johnny B. Badd, Rick Rude and Missy Hyatt (talk about shades of the past!) will be repeated Wednesday (June 8) in syndication across the country....The *Eastern Championship* show has been moved most Friday evenings to 8 p.m. on American Independent NetworkOnce and for all: the item about Paul Heyman hosting *Shenanigans '94* on Nickelodeon was part of our April Fool. It isn't true and I'm surprised some folks fell for that one. If you'll remember our celebrated April Fool issue of 1991, we had Paul being signed to host a magazine series called *Dangerous Assignments*. For a newsletter with limited readership, this game show thing stirred up a furor. Even Paul E. called to find out about it. I'm sure Jim Cornette would love to be part of an equity deal with Titan Sports but no such luck.

In recent weeks, WCW has lost its newly-added Australian television slot after only six episodes. Our *Matwatcher* Sue Chuter says the TV officials are giving lukewarm hope to a return in October....Jerry Jarrett has left his creative post with Titan to return to Hendersonville, Tn. Reportedly, he will open a company to insure, bond and license jobber wrestlers to any interested group. The idea is to indemnify the big promotions against any future Chuck Austin suits....Even with Jarrett's departure, Titan is still expected to continue selling ad time for the cities in which USWA appears in syndication....The first two episodes of this Friday night's (and Saturday morning's) *Beverly Hillbillies* marathon will be the two-parter in which Granny (Irene Ryan) gets involved in wrestling. The late Mike Mazurki is in part two and the late Alan Reed (original voice of Fred Flintstone) plays the promoter....Missy Hyatt is reportedly wavering between the Montel Williams and Ricki Lake shows to take her sexual harassment story against WCW. Jerry Springer also put in a bid. Montel is expected to have the inside track because Missy has been in Montel's audience previously but Ricki has the fastest-growing talker in the ratings. She'll probably wait another couple of weeks until the EEOC rules on her complaint....Ironical note: the photographer who reportedly posted the partially nude photo of Missy in the CNN Center has still not been disciplined....Missy's also been on the arm of ex-NFL star and boxing bust Mark Gastineau.

Most weeks, *Monday Night Raw* has a ratings boost from the most popular nightly program on cable television, *Murder, She Wrote* and lead-out *Silk Stalkings*, which has more compatible demographics. But the May 23 show did substantially better than *Murder*, which only drew a 2.4 to a 3.0 for *Raw*. On May 30, the ratings were almost even, with *Murder* and *Silk* drawing a 3.2 and *Raw* a 3.1, though the crime series both posted stronger audience shares. Remember, we'll have a follow-up issue next week. FSB.

MATWATCH '94
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